

nize the psychogenic component for the illness but elects to disregard it and treat it as a straightforward organic illness, thereby supporting the patient's displacement of stress onto a somatic target. Since the stress is not dealt with, and since the organic illness is supported, the complaints continue and intensify over time.

There are notable examples of such illness—peptic ulcer disease is a good one. This is a stress-related disease that most physicians treat organically. Globus hystericus is another example of a disease that is invariably stress-induced and that the unsuspecting physician worsens by ordering barium swallows, esophageal manometrics, endoscopies, and follow-up appointments for the sole purpose of physical examination. More flagrant examples are the myofascial pain syndromes. Temporomandibular joint pain is an excellent example of such an illness.

The frequency of iatrogenic illness is debated. Those unskilled at diagnosis will tell you it is infrequent, if not altogether nonexistent. Those in primary care, sensitive to such problems, will tell you that 50% of what they see is stress-related, and by inference, those same patients, in the hands of someone not sensitive to psychogenic illness, will be dealing with 50% iatrogenic illness—the irony, of course, is that the illnesses are their iatryony.

TERENCE M. DAVIDSON, MD  
Professor of Surgery  
Associate Dean for Continuing Medical Education  
University of California, San Diego  
225 Dickinson St (H-895)  
San Diego, CA 92103

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## The War on Drugs

TO THE EDITOR: What is "the war on drugs"? We think it is a fight against

- noncriminal (except that they use illegal drugs) addicts who buy the drugs;
- noncriminal nonaddicts who buy the drugs;
- organized crime (suppliers); and
- criminals who steal to continue their habit (users).

We could eliminate all but one of these adversaries—the "noncriminal" addicts—simply by decriminalizing illegal drugs. As a profession and as a society we do need to fight addiction, in the sense of helping addicts if we can. If drugs were decriminalized, we would still have that battle to wage, as we do today, but probably with not many more enemies.

Well-known political figures, such as George Schultz, are seeing the wisdom of decriminalization. The war on drugs is a war we cannot win, any more than we could win the fight against alcohol during Prohibition. If the money spent on the war against drugs were diverted to treatment for addiction, the medical profession would profit. More important, addicts and society as a whole would be a lot better off. We think it is time the medical profession took a medical and sensible stand on this subject.

Therapy Comment\*  
R. LAWRENCE GIBSON, MD  
14651 S Bascom Ave, Suite 225  
Los Gatos, CA 95032

\*Therapy Comment is a group of practitioners who give consensus opinions on important professional issues.

## The Eye of the Beholder

TO THE EDITOR: This is in response to the letter by Dr Arthur Vall-Spinosa in the December 1989 issue.<sup>1</sup>

"Glowing accounts" are somewhat in the eye of the beholder. I am very enthusiastic about a system in the United States that would permit the entire population to have access to decent medical care. Whether the Canadian health care system is the model we should emulate is open to question. There are clearly problems with the Canadian system, and transplantation to the United States might be very difficult.

Incidentally, there are not "tight limits" on the number of physicians in Canada. This was tried in British Columbia but thrown out in the courts. Certainly, the malpractice specter contributes to the cost of medicine in the United States, but it is not the major obstacle to a cost-effective national health care program.

GERARD N. BURROW, MD  
Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences  
Dean, School of Medicine, M-002  
University of California, San Diego  
La Jolla, CA 92093-0602

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## Tryptophan Use and Fasciitis

TO THE EDITOR: Tryptophan, available both through health food stores and in pharmacies as a soporific, has recently been associated with eosinophilia and myalgias.<sup>1</sup> We report three cases and the biopsy findings of an eosinophilic fasciitis-like process associated with inflammatory myopathy.

### Report of Cases

The patient, a 52-year-old housewife, used 1,500 to 3,000 mg of tryptophan nightly for five years and only recently developed myalgia of her upper and lower extremities. Her creatine kinase level was normal and a complete blood count showed a total leukocyte count of  $26.0 \times 10^9$  per liter with 0.45 eosinophils. A biopsy specimen of gastrocnemius muscle showed macrophages, lymphocytes, and eosinophils invading the perimysium and endomysium (Figure 1). The muscle fibers themselves appeared relatively normal, but stains for adenosine triphosphatase showed fiber type grouping.

The second patient, a 29-year-old woman, had been taking 1,500 mg of tryptophan two to three times a week to help her sleep. Progressively worsening myalgias developed, associated with a red rash and a leukocyte count of  $17.6 \times 10^9$  per liter with 0.56 eosinophils. A biopsy specimen of right gastrocnemius muscle showed an inflammatory infiltrate composed of a mixture of lymphocytes, macrophages, eosinophils, and plasma cells in the fascia with spillage into the perimysium and adipose tissue. The perineurium of several nerves in the specimen showed prominent inflammatory infiltrates. Staining for adenosine triphosphatase disclosed fiber type II predominance.

The third case is most intriguing as the patient presented in 1985 with a livedo-type rash on her anterior thighs and complaints of diffuse myalgia associated with low-grade fever and 0.3 peripheral eosinophilia. A creatine kinase level was normal. She had been taking as much as 3,000 mg of tryptophan each night to help her sleep. A biopsy specimen of right gastrocnemius at that time showed a scattered in-